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ABSTRACT

This paper discusses the nature and function of children's literature and theater. Artistic creative work for children is constituted not only by literature but also by the theater, film, radio and television. Children's literature used to be an art of narration, a verbal text coupled with gesture. Modern, highly technical communication media have expanded and popularized the multiplicity of a children's text. The role of parents and teachers and other professionals such as librarians in helping children encounter literature and theater is discussed. The Biennial of Art, an interdisciplinary and scientific review and exhibition of various forms of children's art, is described. (JMB)

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JERZY CIEŚLIKOWSKI

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W a r s a w 1977

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ARTISTIC WORKS FOR CHILDREN

The Dictionary of Polish Contemporary Writers contains more than 1300 names. 272 articles contain information on authors of children's books. This represents 20 per cent of writers. This means that every fifth Polish writer writes occasionally or regularly for children or also for children. With some of them writing for children is their full-time work, with others it predominates. For a part of authors writing for children means the practice of just one species of literary work, together with other literary species; it happens that for some of them the writing of a work "for children" is a single incident, on some occasion, most frequently personal, emotional. The profession of a children's writer has been consolidated and institutionalized in contemporary Poland. A children's writer, however, is not a commercially-oriented supplier of goods to the market: a market that is absorptive and seemingly little exacting; the State, which is the main publisher and distributor of books, wants them to perform useful pedagogical, educational, aesthetic and ludic functions. This that not mean, however, that children's literature is a work treated as an instrumental and

pragmatically determined creative work. The instrumentaliness of this literature in contemporary Poland is only or most frequently a secondary phenomenon, while its no mean autotelic values determine the models of this manipulation.

But artistic creative work for children is constituted not only by literature but also by the theatre, the film, the radio and the TV. The theatre for younger children means first of all puppets, while the film must be animated. The radio and the TV have produced their own specific types of creative work for children. the TV theatre operates with various kinds of puppets, as well as prima vista drawings, live actors, and finally animated films and actor's films. The radio has produced broadcasts in which the element of music and song plays a considerable role for younger children.

Literature for children, especially for kindergarten children, is a work which must be communicated by voice and gesture of a live and adult reader or narrator, or which must be communicated by word-picture or picture-word transmission, depending on which of these media predominate. A pictorial book constitutes not only a vehicle for a literary text, but it is also a basic literary species of this literature. Many literary texts for children are built in a manner ensuring their spectacular existence. The comics, which in adult literature constitute for numerous writers and readers a margin of intellectual and aesthetic ambitions, may be in children's literature a particularly universal form of the existence of

a literary work.

As far as animated film is concerned, the verbal texts or the sounds can constitute merely a commentary, which does not change, however, the fact that this film also belongs to narrative art, implementing, therefore, the specificity of literature.

The history of children's literature may show numerous examples where the author was at the same time the draughtsman. The word and the drawing formed a coherent narration. The word again, before it was written, was first spoken, either loudly or internally. Its manually fixed form revalorized its phonic form. A written sentence reproduced the persevering course of speech - its pause, suspension of the voice. More, even a graphic record tried to reproduce the mimics and the gestures of the narrator. A verse or story for children referred not only to pictures and animising tracks, but also to structures of children's games, to magical formulae used by children, to the way of their thinking and associating, finally to the language of children - to the literariness but also to the perversity characteristic of this language, to the realism and the magic, to the imperfection resulting from the unmastering of grammatical rules, but at the same time to the unconscious discoveriness resulting from the unmastering of linguistic conventions: to the children's play with the word, a product still ununderstood, that is funny, misterious, pretty in itself or

interesting.

A literary text for the youngest is not a canonic text and it is not a text determined by its editorial shape. It is an open text - open to co-partnership of the recipient who concretizes it to the full, and open to its possible translations into a different, extra-verbal, creative material. A child narrates a literary work as it remembers it... but it feels always that it is not ordinary speaking, serving the establishment of contact with the environment, but that it is a speaking that is different - solemn and autothelic. A child realizes the aesthetics of a "poetical" text. At the same time, a child does not experience "genological" inhibitions - it easily translates a spoken word into a sung word, into a shouted word; it translates a literary object and happening into a drawing, into a stick-in picture, or introduces it into its motor games.

Children's writers take into account this active and unconventional perception of a text by a child, and they take into consideration this syncretism and multi-material character of the text. Hence a children's writer is usually not only a sensu stricto writer but also a draughtsman, singer, choregrapher, animator and a man who plays with the child. A literary text itself may constitute a score for the arrangement of different materials, it may also exist and be aesthetically and ludically fulfilled in its execution (anonciation). In its happening and not in the final fact, in expression

(enoncé), in a finished work, printed and kept in the museum of memory.

Thus reasoning - we want to extend the formula of children's literature to an area of artistic facts greater than only those which are printed in a book, and even those which belong to verbal literature passed in this way by one generation to another. The name of children's literature is given both to sensu stricto literature and to children's film of theatre.

Thus conceived literature or art for children, in the manner of its emergence but first of all in the manner of its perception, seems to reproduce its oldest form when it was simultaneously a word, a gesture and a picture, when it was a rite, a game and a magic, when it was a form of expression for different emotional states. Because this is how a word is treated by a child or how a child is inclined to or capable of behaving when it is provoked thus either internally or from the outside.

Children's literature used to be an art of narration connected with certain distinct circumstances: at the fireside, beneath a tree, at table, at bedtime, in the course of a game. It used to be a verbal text coupled with gesture. It could constitute the score of a motor game, or a text for a mimetic game, a piece to be sung, or a mnemotechnic formula. Last but not least, it used to be a bible of the paupers:

a picture or a book of pictures. Modern, highly technical communication media have even expanded and popularized the multiplicacity of a children's text. Contemporary ludic culture addressed to the mass recipient makes a wide use of these perfected but also to some extent traditional media. But if a literary work for children is to shine in its artistic fulness, if it is to be a work addressed both to the eye and the ear, to the imagination and the intellect, to a child's motor activeness, and if it is to be in turn an inspiration and material for expressions of various types - it must always contain these possibilities in a code, it must find for them an adequate editorial form, and it must finally encounter its recipient in a favourable situation.

A writer, a draughtsman and a publisher constitute, if not simultaneous, then an organically and harmoniously creative team. A contemporary children's book and children's paper is an integrated product of these three creators. Of course, a literary text for children may exist outside a children's book, and in theory even outside a child recipient, but, in the first case, only a part of the texts may exist in such a way. We call them child texts and not texts for children. This means that they are executed in accordance with certain rules of child poetics, but they belong to general literature. The same texts, however, reprinted in children's books, circulating on the orbit of child communication, begin to be subject of different rules, their graphic appearance may be captional (different varieties of carmina figurata), they be-

gin to be coupled with a picture or an iconic sign. But only their full perception by a child concretizes their form.

The three above men have also such helpers as adults who play various social and cultural roles. They are sometimes parents or family members, more frequently, and at present very frequently, kindergarten teachers. It is they who read or narrate stories, who animize them, who operate tape recorders and video tape recorders, who switch on TV-sets and wireless sets. It is they who build situations of reception: they watch and instruct children's behaviour during the reception of a broadcast or a show. It is they who tell children which literary text is to be learnt by heart, which is to be sung, to be clapped out, to be danced, to be played, to be drawn, to be stuck-in, etc ... Thanks to their inventiveness, ability, industriousness and pedagogical and aesthetic skill - a literary text lives up to its live formula. And in this multi-semiotic sense it remains later in the memory of a child. Its kindergarten concretization whose directions or vectors of active and creative reception are suggested to a child becomes in turn an inspiration of play - an auto-communication of the child. And precisely because verbal children's literature is a literature of the time before a child can read, the role and plays of its live or mechanical transmitter becomes so significant and essential. A verbal text as only a printed text practically does not exist for a child.

A children's paper, in our situation, for example, "Miś" - a paper for the youngest - is both a book with pictures appearing regularly every fortnight, that is tackling and continuing certain fabular narrative stories, and an illustrated magazine - a children's silva rerum. A children's paper performs of course numerous functions. Besides cognitive, educational or aesthetic functions, it performs also a highly specific meta-informative functions. And only in a children's paper various literary and journalistic species live in harmony and in a natural manner, as they do not do in a paper for adults. A literary text printed in a children's paper is more frequently conceived as instrumental, subordinated to various external occasions - regular social, cultural and natural calendars, as well as to various internal pedagogical and educational occasions, because a children's paper constitutes both a book of instruction and a school textbook.

Similarly, several transmitters are to be found at the beginning, at the source of an animated film and a radio broadcast: as regards the film, they are the director, the script writer and team of draughtsmen, as regards a broadcast - they are also the director, the author of the text and the actors.

Tremendous changes have taken place in a comparatively short time in Poland in the model of the circulation of children's literature. Before the last war there were two channels and at the same time two trends: spoken literature and printed literature served children depending on their social and

economic position. Country children and children of urban proletariat practically never saw a children's book. Their literature, common for all children, was represented by children's folklore, that is products of the children themselves, most frequently of country children and of child members of the play of the town courtyard.

It was only under conditions of the socialist state that the situation of the child recipients was democratized independently of their social environment. The establishment of equal rights permitted the use of comparatively inexpensive books, radio, TV, an ever wider network of children's cinemas and theatres and last but not least of social guardianship institutions, such as kindergartens, summer and winter holiday camps, playing grounds, etc.

Contemporary communication of a text for children is not only on the level of a child but it is also sometimes on the level of an adult. A children's literary text and a text of behaviours specific for childhood and childishness becomes a part of mass culture, of the fashion, it becomes a domaine of institutions and service enterprises which offer parents, guardians and adults in general not only material objects but also myths.

The art for children is served by individual artists or artists organized in unions or groups - writers, painters, sculptors, draughtsmen, graphic designers, film producers and actors, directors, musicians, but also by journalists, review-

ers in various disciplines, scientists and scholars, publishers.

Books are circulated with the help of librarians, libraries and children's reading rooms; primary education in the teaching of reading and writing is in the hands of educators in kindergartens, houses of culture, organizers of children's parties and festivals. A children's book is an object of the care of authors and publishers, being frequently not only a transmitter of certain communications, but becoming an object of art interesting for collectors. Being a book it performs new functions - it becomes an element of a complex toy, a model of aesthetic and politechnical manipulations. Comicses or comics-resembling texts are often a common reading for adults and children. The situation is similar with some film cartoons or some puppet theatre shows.

Every two years, starting six years ago, a Biennale of Art for Children is held in Poznań. It is an interdisciplinary event which is evaluated scientifically. It is held under the patronate of the Ministry of Culture and Arts and the Ministry of Education and Upbringing. Its untiring and inspired organizers are the authorities and cultural and scientific institutions of the City of Poznań. The Second Biennale's motto in 1975 was art for children of pre-school age. The Biennale is a review of films, theatres, radio broadcasts and TV shows for children. Exhibitions of plastic art by adults for children, of children's paintings, of stage design and folk art for children, of children's toys and books are held during every

Biennale. Each Biennale is also accompanied by scientific sessions and film and theatrical seminars.Organizers of Biennale prefer ambitious dedicated art which is at the same time novel in its form. This aim is served by various competitions: a composers' competition for a song and an instrumental piece, a playwrights' for a play written in cooperation between a writer and a theatre, a toy competition, a game equipment competition, a competition for a book edition. Prizes are awarded to publishers, authors, designers, reviewers and young scientists tackling the problematique of research on creative work for children.

The art for children, especially literature, has been for many years an object of interest of persons connected with literary criticism, pedagogics, book reading, psychology and the theatre - treated as scientific disciplines. Children's literature has been also for many years an object of research conducted in university centres. Historical and critical literary research was initiated many years ago by the Higher Pedagogical School in Warsaw and the Higher Pedagogical School in Opole. The most active and productive in this respect are at present: the Polish Philology Institutes of the University of Warsaw and the University of Wrocław, as well as Library Science and Pedagogical Institutes of the University of Warsaw, the University of Gdańsk and the Higher Pedagogical School in Cracow. Notwithstanding the different attitudes and research methods and different proposals con-

cerning the conception and qualification of the objects of literary research - university researchers meet in inter--university teams, here also in interdisciplinary teams.

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